**04KATHMANDU1550**

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 C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KATHMANDU 001550 SIPDIS DEPT FOR SA/INS, PRM/ANE BEIJING PLEASE PASS CHENGDU E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/04/2014 TAGS: PREF PGOV PREL BT IN NP UNHCR SUBJECT: NEPAL: UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE ON BHUTANESE/TIBETAN REFUGEE ISSUES REF: A. KATHMANDU 1096 [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/04kathmandu1550#parB) B. KATHMANDU 1418 [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/04kathmandu1550#parC) C. KATHMANDU 1479 [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/04kathmandu1550#parD) D. KATHMANDU 1054 [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/04kathmandu1550#parE) E. KATHMANDU 1147 [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/04kathmandu1550#parF) F. KATHMANDU 4544 [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/04kathmandu1550#parG) G. KATHMANDU 1288 [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/04kathmandu1550#parH) H. KATHMANDU 1319 Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty; Reasons 1.4 (b/d). [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/04kathmandu1550#par1) 1. (C) SUMMARY: UNHCR Representative Abraham Abraham expressed the hope to the Ambassador on August 4 that the verification of Bhutanese refugees would resume. Meanwhile, for the first time, some Bhutanese refugees had begun to ask for immediate third-country resettlement. On Tibetans, UNHCR was sending letters to border officials to encourage respect for the "Gentleman's Agreement," was planning to quietly establish a UNHCR border post, and was planning a seminar for border officials on refugee issues by the end of the year. END SUMMARY. ============================ BHUTANESE REFUGEES - PROCESS ============================ [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/04kathmandu1550%22%20%5Cl%20%22par2) 2. (C) During a call on the Ambassador on August 4, UNHCR Representative Abraham Abraham noted that Embassy support for UNHCR had visibly affected GON attitudes towards refugee issues. On the Bhutanese refugee front, Abraham, who had met on August 3 with State Minister for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat, believed it likely the bilateral process would restart. It appeared as though the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) was ready to leave the 22 December incident behind and restart the process. Although he could not confirm whether the next meeting would be at the Ministerial or technical level, Abraham thought perhaps at the Joint Verification Team (JVT) level. Mahat had sounded optimistic, Abraham reported, even though no dates had been set for the next step in the verification or repatriation process. The Ambassador, who had spoken with Mahat on August 2, agreed, and informed Abraham that he raised the refugees everytime he saw Mahat. It was fair to be guardedly optimistic that a 16th round might occur; of course, that did not mean any real progress would be made. However, Indian involvement with the issue could make a real difference, and it appeared that the GON had been actively courting the GOI to get involved. Abraham noted that when he gave a talk at the think tank in New Delhi in May, there appeared to be a recognition that India had an important role to play regarding Bhutanese refugees. [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/04kathmandu1550#par3) 3. (C) Abraham stated that he had asked the GON (via Mahat) to allow UNHCR to begin processing third-country resettlement for the most vulnerable cases (i.e., families with a female head-of-household, refugees that had suffered from trafficking or abuse). Moreover, some refugees, no longer willing to wait for the bilateral process to bear fruit, had also started asking UNHCR for a third-country solution. According to Abraham, Mahat stated that the repatriation process would have to begin before any third-country options were considered. Otherwise, resettlement could undermine the credibility of the bilateral negotiation process, the RGOB might be let off the hook and Nepal would be left with the refugees. However, the Foreign Ministry would start internal discussions on how to move quickly on the most vulnerable refugee cases. [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/04kathmandu1550#par4) 4. (C) UNHCR had been pressing the GON to allow UNHCR to carry out a profiling of the refugees and a socio-economic survey of the seven refugee camps and surrounding local areas, Abraham noted. The profiling was designed to better identify those in need of special protection (i.e., those who might not safely return to Bhutan no matter the established conditions of repatriation), and would provide the refugees better identification. It was part of a new worldwide system UNHCR was putting into place. Better identification would help especially with security concerns that had arisen from the Maoist insurgency. The survey would ideally give UNHCR a better understanding of the refugees' economic conditions compared to nearby Nepali locals, which would allow UNHCR, working with donors, to design better programs for the refugees. The survey would also help establish a baseline of refugee needs. Moreover, it would help those willing donors to design development programs for the surrounding communities; this could alleviate economic imbalances and tensions between the local areas and the refugees. UNHCR also planned to develop an information campaign about the rights and responsibilities of the refugees. Thus far, however, the GON had demurred on the survey. Abraham insisted that there was no intention of reducing levels of support to the refugees; the intent was to better direct the support to refugee needs. UNHCR Nepal was also responding to directions from Geneva to look at ways to hand off maintenance of the refugees to other partners, to retain UNHCR's primary focus on protection. Meanwhile, Abraham had met with NGOs who had been interested, but wanted support from donors and a blessing from the GON to participate. The Ambassador understood that the GON may fear the survey because it could look like the beginning of local integration into Nepali society and reduce the pressure on the RGOB. Abraham understood, and added that at the same time the profiling was important to get a head count of the refugees, it might also reveal much fewer refugees in the camps, possibly as low as 80,000. ================ TIBETAN REFUGEES ================ [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/04kathmandu1550%22%20%5Cl%20%22par5) 5. (C) Turning to Tibetan refugees, Abraham explained that to date the GON had not responded to UNHCR's request to issue instructions regarding the terms of the "Gentleman's Agreement" to its border officials. (NOTE: The Ambassador has raised this issue with the Prime Minister and Home Ministry, but also did not receive a clear response. END NOTE.) Despite this, Abraham had been penning letters explaining the GON's obligations and the practice used to bring Tibetan refugees to Kathmandu, and had sent these letters to border officials each time his staff (or those from the Tibetan Refugee Resettlement Center) made border visits. He also planned to send more staff for longer visits to the Kodari border crossing point, ultimately to establish quietly a more permanent UNHCR office. It would be ideal if the U.S. could provide assistance to staff such a post, Abraham added. Increasing UNHCR's border presence would ideally reduce the chances of refoulement. Meanwhile, UNHCR had hired a local lawyer to join the border missions. Additionally, UNHCR planned to hold by the end of the year a seminar for border officials (i.e., Ministry of Home, Army, Armed Police Force, civilian police) on international law and regulations protecting refugees. Meanwhile, the efficiency of processing refugees for onward transit to India had been improved by adding additional UNHCR staff at the Tibetan Refugee Resettlement Center, and by the agreement of the Indian Embassy to interview increasing numbers of cases each day. ==================== AHMADIS IN KATHMANDU ==================== [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/04kathmandu1550%22%20%5Cl%20%22par6) 6. (C) Abraham also mentioned increasing numbers of Ahmadis arriving on the direct flight from Karachi seeking UNHCR protection and resettlement. About 160 Ahmadi asylum seekers had thus far arrived in Kathmandu, and according to reports, many were also appearing in Hong Kong and Sri Lanka. UNHCR Nepal may request extra support from Geneva to interview them to determine the possible refugee status of this latest group of asylees. ======= COMMENT ======= [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/04kathmandu1550#par7) 7. (C) UNHCR continues to design and test potential solutions to the difficulties the organization faces operating here, such as the plan to eventually open an office at the Kodari border crossing where most Tibetans transit and asking donors to support a development program in areas surrounding the Bhutanese refugee camps. However, there is little UNHCR can do to help with the strictly bilateral verification process on Bhutanese refugees. Should some repatriation eventually occur, it remains unclear who would provide monitoring and protection to the refugees in Bhutan. Abraham noted that the RGOB had not allowed UNHCR to open a country office in Bhutan, a sign that UNHCR would not be able to fulfill its protection mandate in Bhutan under any eventual repatriation. It remains to be seen how many of the Bhutanese refugees would be willing to voluntarily return without UNHCR in Bhutan to verify their safety. MORIARTY